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Provisional summary record (partial)* of the 36th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 21 July 2008, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Hoscheit (Vice-President) ..... (Luxembourg)

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting. A panel discussion was conducted.

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The meeting was preceded by a panel discussion on "An inclusive and coherent approach to climate change: the role of the United Nations system". The panel was chaired by Mr. Jean-Marc Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President of the Council. The panellists were Mr. Robert Orr, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Planning, and Mr. Thomas Stelzer, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs.

In the absence of Mr. Mérorès (Haiti), Mr. Hoscheit (Luxembourg), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The discussion covered in the summary record began at 11.30 a.m.

Coordination, programme and other questions (*continued*)

(a) Reports of coordination bodies (E/2008/58 and A/63/16)

(b) Proposed strategic framework for the period 2010-2011 (relevant fascicles of A/63/6)

1. **Mr. Stelzer** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs), introducing the annual overview report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination for 2007-2008 (E/2008/58), said that the Chief Executives Board (CEB) had consolidated its role of promoting coherence within the United Nations system.

2. The CEB had often been mentioned during the informal consultations on system-wide coherence at the two previous sessions of the General Assembly, where considerable emphasis had been placed on its role in ensuring coherence, effectiveness and efficiency. General Assembly resolution 62/208, on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, stressed that the purpose of reform was to make the United Nations development system more efficient and effective in its support for developing countries' efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals on the basis of their national development strategies.

3. Climate change was one of the Board's programme priorities and its High-Level Committee on Programmes had played a key role in the formulation of the United Nations system's contribution to the December 2007 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The outcome of the Board's work on sectoral elements of a coordinated response and an inventory of system activities had formed the basis for the Secretary-General's overview of United Nations activities in relation to climate change (A/62/644).

4. The views expressed by Member States during that debate had led to an initiative, within the CEB framework, aimed at facilitating a coordinated approach to intergovernmental negotiations in preparation for the next Conference of the Parties, to be held in December 2008.

5. The Board's task was to review the challenges posed by the global food crisis and to adopt a common strategy in support of developing countries. In April 2008, it had called on the international community to fund the emergency requirements of the World Food Programme (WFP) as a matter of urgency. It also asked States to reconsider their policies on food export restrictions, to seek an early conclusion to the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations and to address the specific needs of Africa, the region most affected by the crisis.

6. In preparing and coordinating the implementation of a plan of action on priorities, the Board had established the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, which had prepared a comprehensive framework for action as a contribution to the policy debate held at the Rome High-level Conference on World Food Security in June 2008. The framework for action had later been sent to the leaders of the Group of Eight for their consideration and had been circulated to delegations at the current session of the Council.

7. The Board had focused on the need for clarity in the various African development initiatives within the United Nations system and had welcomed the launch of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Africa Steering Group and the Millennium Development Goal Africa Working Group, which focused on operational gaps in day-to-day cooperation between United Nations system organizations and international financial institutions.

8. The Board had developed a Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work and a document entitled "Trade Capacity-Building: Inter-Agency Resource Guide", issued under the auspices of the High-Level Committee on Programmes.

It was also considering a number of other programme matters, including the United Nations system action plan for the further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries during the period 2007-2010, aid for trade, and disaster reduction.

9. General Assembly discussions on system-wide coherence had highlighted the potential role of improved business practices in the delivery of results. A plan of action for the harmonization of business practices, which contained proposals covering all the major management functions of United Nations common system organizations in the areas of finance and budget, human resources, and information and communication technologies had been developed. The proposed activities represented a new level of commitment, by the organizations of the United Nations system, to realigning and harmonizing business practices; its implementation would take existing intergovernmental guidance fully into account.

10. The Board had endeavoured to improve its cooperation with other inter-agency mechanisms. It had achieved integration of the procurement network into the High-Level Committee on Management, established a legal network and provided support for the Delivering as One pilot projects. In April 2008, it had held its first meeting, at which the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) had formally reported as part of the CEB structure. The UNDG mechanism had been significantly streamlined and held regular consultations with the two High-Level Committees — on Programmes and Management, respectively — in order to ensure a clear division of labour. The establishment of an advisory group on country operations was also considered an important component of the Group's restructuring.

11. Turning to operational issues, he said that the CEB had taken note of the initial results of the Delivering as One pilot projects and the remaining challenges. Government leadership and involvement were key to ensuring that the United Nations system was in line with national priorities. Country teams were actively exploring ways for the system to respond to those priorities by joint thinking, prioritization and planning. In order to keep the annual overview report concise and focused, an effort had been made to avoid extensive treatment of other important issues. The CEB and the executive heads of United Nations system organizations remained firmly committed to promoting coherent approaches to system-wide themes, building on the mandate provided by their governing bodies, in order to help member States with their implementation of intergovernmental mandates. In light of the results of the CEB review, the Board had been strengthened in order to play its role with greater efficiency.

12. **The President** announced that as the Chairman of the forty-eighth session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination could not be present to introduce the report of the Committee (A/63/16), the text of his planned statement was being circulated.

13. **Mr. Ali** (Malaysia) said that greater effort must be made to strengthen the links between the CEB, the wider membership of the United Nations and, in particular, the Council. It was disconcerting that the dialogue with the Board during the general segment had been limited to a half-day discussion. Strengthening those links would promote greater coherence between the Board's activities and the perspectives of Member States and increase the level of transparency of its work. He suggested that the Council should hold quarterly discussions with the Board and that the High-Level Committees on Programmes and Management should brief the Second and Fifth Committees of the General Assembly, respectively.

14. Commenting specifically on the overview report (E/2008/58), he suggested that the effectiveness of the UNDG's integration into the CEB should be assessed. His Government was particularly interested in the role played by the Development Operations Coordination Office and the challenges it faced in providing technical support to UNDG, and in supporting country-level coordination through the resident coordinator system.

15. His delegation was concerned that the section of the report that dealt with the evaluation of the Delivering as One initiative made no mention of the role of Member States. Like many other delegations, it had repeatedly stressed that evaluation involved not only determination of the efficacy of the initiative, but also a review of its methodology and of the extent to which lessons learned were to be implemented elsewhere.

16. He would welcome clarification of how duplication between the work of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis and that of the High-Level Committee on Programmes would be avoided. Notwithstanding the explanation of the limited focus of the report that had been provided by the Assistant

Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, he believed that gender mainstreaming should have been addressed, especially since the gender architecture had been discussed and concerns that gender mainstreaming might lead to "gender outstreaming" had been raised.

17. **Ms. Ahlenius** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services) reported on the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) thematic evaluation of lessons learned: protocols and practices, requested by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-sixth session in 2006 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/235. The purpose of the evaluation, which would be submitted to the Committee in 2009, had been to identify and assess the systems and mechanisms used to identify, capture and disseminate lessons learned in the Secretariat and to determine the extent to which they were used to enhance performance. Thirty-two Secretariat programmes and six system-wide coordinating committees had been evaluated. The findings revealed that most Secretariat programmes lacked a systematic approach to lessons learned and that there was no overall framework, office or mechanism that coordinated such work. Informal means were most frequently used but in cases where more formal methods had been adopted, they were reported to have had a positive effect on operational efficiency and programme effectiveness.

18. Informal communications among staff and personal experience were the mechanisms most commonly used by the programmes and coordinating committees working in the economic and social fields. That approach presented a serious challenge to the retention of knowledge within the Organization; within five years, the proportion of staff retiring from the programmes could reach 48 per cent and valuable knowledge could be lost.

19. A number of formal mechanisms for lessons learned had been identified in the evaluation exercise. "Post-mortems" were often conducted after the implementation of a specific activity in order to review and discuss problems and positive results and to identify successful and unsuccessful practices; such meetings were often held by offices responsible for organizing and servicing intergovernmental meetings and conferences, such as the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Expert group meetings and international conferences brought together specialists who shared knowledge within their field, after which their expertise could be harnessed for future planning and implementation of activities.

20. Evaluations, another formal mechanism, involved the gathering and documentation of information on lessons learned in order to improve institutional learning and provide support for strategic planning and decision-making. However, the extent of evaluation activity within programmes varied greatly; for the 2004-2005 biennium, fewer than half the total number of Secretariat programmes had undergone any form of internal or external evaluation.

21. While programme performance planning and monitoring were also used, they played a lesser role because of the limited use of performance data for managerial assessment and decision-making in subprogrammes. In order to overcome that problem, some programmes had taken steps to ensure that lessons learned were effectively incorporated into the next cycle of project and programme planning.

22. Communities of practice and databases were among the two least commonly used mechanisms. Although communities of practice had proved useful in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank efforts to connect practitioners worldwide, they were rarely used in the Secretariat and databases were even less common. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) offered a rare example of a database that had served as a useful tool for storing and sharing knowledge, thereby enhancing programme effectiveness and operational efficiency. Outside the United Nations, databases had become a tool for the exchange of successful practices and the facilitation of decentralized cooperation among groups.

23. Coordinating bodies had played a limited role in the process of learning from experience, although UNDG played a more relevant role in that regard. Their guidance materials, distributed to all country teams, had been formulated on the basis of exercises in stocktaking and lessons learned. The thematic evaluation had attempted to identify obstacles that prevented programmes from collecting and using lessons in a more systematic way. Allocation of the necessary resources, managerial commitment and stakeholder support were crucial; while organizations such as UNDP were already implementing training and incentive systems to promote the use of knowledge

gained through experience, such systems were still non-existent in the Secretariat.

24. OIOS therefore recommended that coordination within and among programmes should be improved and that a unit should be created within the Secretariat to assume responsibility for coordinating and assisting programmes in the collection and use of lessons and best practices. Such functions should be made more systematic, and training in the various systems and mechanisms that staff and programmes could use should be provided. It was also necessary to raise awareness of the importance of documenting knowledge.

25. **Mr. Cooper** (United States of America) said that the CEB was uniquely positioned to leverage the strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations system, the various bodies of which should work together on cross-cutting issues and ensure maximum efficiency. The Board's recommendation that only independent audit reports completed after the adoption of its disclosure policy and subject to a variety of conditions and criteria should be released to Member States would mean that the policy did not apply to previously published audit reports. While that option could include granting Member States the possibility to read recent audit reports in the internal audit office and to submit any questions to the chief audit executive, it would give Member States a limited picture of the situation. The General Assembly had long since authorized OIOS to grant Member States access to its internal audit reports, a policy that greatly enhanced the transparency and oversight capacity of the Assembly. Such access was vital since it allowed Member States to exercise their fiduciary responsibility in ensuring the optimal use of funds. Original versions of old internal audit and investigative reports should be made available upon request to Member States, who should be free to pose questions as needed.

26. With regard to coordination and budget planning within the United Nations in the context of the proposed strategic framework for 2010-2011 (relevant fascicles of A/63/6) and the work of the Committee on Programme Coordination, he noted that some of the proposed changes to the strategic framework were of a technical nature while others appeared to be based on political considerations. His delegation would review the Committee's final report when it was presented at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

27. The Committee was not fulfilling one of its primary tasks, that of coordinating the work of the Organization. The concept of maintaining an intergovernmental planning body that was incapable of effectively overseeing and providing guidance on the basic elements of programming, budgeting, implementation, evaluation and coordination should be reconsidered. The work and functions of the Committee should be reoriented in order more closely to reflect the objectives for which it had been established and to ensure maximum use of the resources provided by Member States.

28. **Mr. Blake** (Observer for Antigua and Barbuda), asked whether a lack of resources was the only obstacle to the adoption of formal methods for making use of lessons learned; he wondered whether other structural factors were also involved.

29. **Mr. Stelzer** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs), responding to the representative of Malaysia's comments on the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), said that since the process of integration had only recently been completed, it was too early for its results to be measured.

30. Evaluation of the Delivering as One pilot projects was a three-stage process, the first of which was still in progress owing to a lack of resources. It was, however, expected to be completed soon and the results would be presented in the next overview report.

31. He recalled that for the sake of conciseness, the report had not attempted to elaborate on all the important issues under discussion. Gender issues were among the topics of great interest on which further information would be provided in the next report.

32. Duplication between the work of the High-Level Committee on Programmes and that of the High-level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis would be avoided because the two bodies operated at different levels; the Task Force was composed of the executive heads of United Nations system-wide organizations whereas the High-Level Committee's members were the deputy heads of such bodies.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.